

# COMPARING THE CORE IDEAS BETWEEN WANG YANGMING AND BERNARD LONERGAN: MIND, KNOWING AND DOING, AND SELF-APPROPRIATION

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*Abstract: This article attempted to compare the philosophical ideas between Wang Yangming (1472–1529) and Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984). Through an intensive study of the original works of *The Philosophy of Wang Yangming*, translated by Frederick Goodrich Henke and published in 1916, and *Lonergan's Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957) and *Method in Theology* (1972), the author was able to reach three findings: (1) Wang's mind as the embodiment of heaven-given principles (Xinjili 心即理) is comparable to Lonergan's pure desire of mind for God with the goodness of man's will; (2) Wang's unity of knowledge and practice (Zhixingheyi 知行合一) is comparable to Lonergan's consistency of knowing and doing; and (3) Wang's extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost (Zhiliangzhi 致良知) is comparable to Lonergan's self-appropriation. The literature review highlighted the comparative studies on Wang Yangming and western philosophers like Kant, Husserl, Stanley Cavell, Schleiermacher, René Descartes, Max Scheler, and Francis Bacon. This comparative study is the author's amazing journey of "East meets West."*

## I. Introduction

The author was invited to teach the course Asia 6140: Survey of Chinese Civilization in the Spring Semester 2021 at Seton Hall University. In the process of preparing for the course and teaching, the author came across Wang Yangming (王陽明 1472–1529), an influential Neo-Confucian thinker of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) who founded the School of Heart/Mind philosophy (Xinxue 心學). The author's intuitive knowledge made him think that Wang Yangming's Heart/Mind philosophy seemed to be like Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984)'s idea of self-appropriation, which he learned through attending Seton Hall's Praxis Program in the Spring Semester 2020.<sup>1</sup> The author thought it would be an interesting project to compare the two great thinkers' philosophical ideas.

The author's research question is, "What are the similarities between the two thinkers' ideas on mind, knowing and doing, and knowledge of the good?" Wang Yangming's eureka enlightenment moment was when he got the idea of "Heavenly principles" starting from one's own heart/mind (Xinjili 心即理) after an extended

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meditation by lying in a stone coffin in a remote Longchang cave (Dong 2020; Brown 1999). Wang's other core ideas include "unity of knowledge and practice" (Zhixingheyi 知行合一) and "extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost" (Zhiliangzhi 致良知). The author is curious to find out if Lonergan had similar thoughts. By comparing the thoughts of Wang Yangming and Lonergan, he may understand some commonalities of the Eastern and Western philosophies so that he can help himself do better in his teaching, library work, and personal life.

## II. Literature Review

The author's literature review has threefold: (1) Wang Yangming's life and philosophy, and (2) Bernard Lonergan's life and philosophy. They provide overviews for readers. (3) A review of comparative studies on Wang Yangming and western philosophers like Kant, Husserl, Stanley Cavell, Schleiermacher, René Descartes, Max Scheler, and Francis Bacon. It provides the scholarly background for the author's comparative study of Wang Yangming and Lonergan.

### 2.1 Wang Yangming's Life and Philosophy

Wang Yangming (1472 - 529) was born in Yuyao, Zhejiang Province, the son of a minister of civil personnel in Nanjing (Brown, 1999). Wang is his family name, and Yangming is the nickname given by his students, meaning "bright clarity" (Irons 2016). His name Shou-ren (守仁), given by his father, means "to guard benevolence and humanity," one of Confucius' tenets.

Irons wrote: "Wang himself led a very colorful life. After attaining his jinshi degree, the highest scholarly attainment, he held many official posts over his career, including that of general. It seems that he ran afoul of the throne, however, and was publicly flogged before being banished to the southwestern frontier...while in exile that he had an intuitive awakening... recognized the intuitive moral knowledge residing within each person..." (Irons, 2016)

Wang was a Confucian scholar and Ming Dynasty official "whose idealistic interpretation of Neo-Confucianism influenced philosophical thinking in East Asia for centuries" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017). Murphy wrote: "Wang developed a philosophy that would have a dramatic effect not only on China but also on Japan and Korea, both of whose cultures were influenced by China. His teaching would be perpetuated through schools of philosophy during much of the 16th century." (Murphy, 2016) Antonio S. Cua wrote: "The basic concern of Wang's philosophy is the question, How can one become a Confucian sage (sheng)? It is a question intelligible only in the light of understanding and commitment to the Confucian vision of ren, or ideal of the universe as a moral community." (Cua, 2015) Wang suggested: "...the human mind possesses an innate capacity for distinguishing between good and

evil... Wang's conversations with his students were collected in his major work, *Ch'uan-hsi lu* (1572; *Instructions for Practical Living* 1963)." (Brown, 1999).

## 2.2. Bernard Lonergan's Life and Philosophy

Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984) was born in Buckingham, Quebec (Lambert and McShane 2013, 22). Lonergan was educated at Heythrop College and Gregorian University, influenced by Aristotle, Aquinas, and Newman, and appointed to teach at Gregorian University (1953–1965); Regis College (1966–70), Toronto (1973–83), and Boston College (Bredin and Bredin, 2002).

Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane have a chapter about him, "The Professional Theologian: 1938-75," in which they wrote: "...he required theology to move in solid empirical fashion towards being at the level of the times while still respecting the sources of Scripture and tradition." (Lambert and McShane, 2013, 60) Lonergan developed his idea of "GEM" as quoted by McShane: "Generalized empirical method operates on a combination of both the data of sense and the data of consciousness: it does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat the subject's operations without taking into account the corresponding objects." (Ibid, 227)

Lonergan was a "Canadian philosopher known especially for a novel 'cognitional theory' outlined in his major philosophical work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957; 2d ed. 1958)" (Byrne, 2015). Hugh Bredin claimed: "A fundamental principle in Lonergan's philosophy is his definition of being as 'the objective of the pure desire to know'... A knowledge of knowledge leads to a knowledge of what is known, and what is known is what there is." (Bredin, 2002)

## 2.3. Comparative Studies of Wang Yangming and Western Philosophers

### 2.3.1. Jesuits/Catholic Theology

George L. Israel discovered that Wang Yangming's writings came to the attention of some Jesuits, such as Julien-Placide Hervieu and Jean-Baptiste du Halde during the 18th century because "They were struck by the similarities between his ethics and practice of moral self-cultivation and their moral traditions and Catholic religious practices." (Israel, 2018, 385) He noted that "Frederick Henke produced the first major translation of his work, a few scholars wrote articles about him, and he was included in the first major German and French surveys of the history of Chinese philosophy." Israel believed: "...both the religious quality of his notion of liangzhi and philosophy more generally, as well as his seeming idealism, paved the way for the reception and interpretation of his thought at this time." (Ibid, 386)

Stephanie Wong conducted a comparative study of the thought of Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming and the Belgian Jesuit Joseph Maréchal to demonstrate how both thinkers affirm the subjective contribution of the human mind in any act of knowing while still maintaining that any accurate or moral knowledge participates in a higher order of ontological being. (Wong, 2018, 109) He maintained: "Wang and

Maréchal both held synthetic understandings of the mind and that this can be a helpful epistemology for Chinese Catholic theology. It will be more productive to conduct Chinese Catholic theology along lines of commonality, rather than adopting epistemologies that set 'Chinese' and 'Catholic' thought fundamentally." (Ibid, 109) Wong concluded: "The agreements between Wang's Neo-Confucian and Maréchal's Transcendental Thomist theories of mind make for a fruitful convergence of the Chinese and Catholic intellectual traditions, from which Chinese theology can contribute to the worldwide Church's understanding of God." (Ibid, 109)

### 2.3.2 *Kant/Husserl and Human Mind*

Xunwu Chen wrote: "Wang suggested that the intentionality of the mind is the bridge between an object existing outside the mind and the knowing mind in its knowing experience. But his concept of the cognitive mind as a mirror prevents his insight from being fruitful. Kant's concept of the cognitive mind as a constructor can remedy the situation, making Wang's insight fruitful." (Chen, 2019, 100) He analyzed Husserl's question of "how does consciousness go beyond itself to know an object existing outside of it" as having "a two-fold one here: on the one hand, it is the question of how does the mind recognize an object as its cognitive object; on the other hand, it is the question of how is an object given to the mind as a cognitive object." (Ibid, 90) Chen compared the insights of Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, Kant, and Husserl and developed new epistemic constructivism (NEC). (Ibid, 104)

NEC is the doctrine that knowledge is constructed by human minds; the mind is producer, builder, and constructor of knowledge; a mind's capacity to receive and power to think and know determines what kind of knowledge the mind can have; all human beings are born with potentials and resources to have minds of great capacity and power to know, but all human beings have a task to cultivate, build, expand, develop and refine constantly his/her's capacity and power to know; knowledge divide between broad and narrow, great and petty, refined and not refined, as well as profound and superficial knowledge; only a broad, great, refined, and profound mind can have broad, great, refined and profound knowledge. (Ibid, 104)

### 2.3.3 *Stanley Cavell and Knowing*

William Day wrote: "The distinction between zhenzhi (real knowing) and changzhi (ordinary knowing) in the thought of the Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming (1472–1529 ce) is central to his well-known teaching of the unity of knowing and acting." (Day, 2012, 174) He wrote: "Cavell argues that knowing another's pain requires acknowledging it. Cavell's concept of acknowledgment answers to Wang's insistence that knowing and acting are one...." (Ibid, 174) Day attempts to highlight sympathies between Wang Yangming's notion of zhenzhi (real knowing) and Stanley Cavell's concept of acknowledgment. (Ibid, 174)

### 2.3.4 *Schleiermacher and Self*

Zijiang Ding called Wang Yangming a great thinker during the Ming Dynasty by combining Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to formalize his theoretic framework. (Ding, 2011, 79) He wrote: “He developed philosophy of mind initially and systematically, and created a theory of self such as self-consciousness, self-cultivation, self-perfection, self-purification, self-realization, self-transcending, and self-transformation.” (Ibid, 79) Ding continued to compare with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1843), a German philosopher and Protestant theologian, who “developed philosophy of mind, and created a theory of self such as self-consciousness, self-realization, self-transcending and self-transformation... The final moral purpose of these two thinkers is to realize and develop the transformation of the self from an ordinary state to the highest good.” (Ibid, 79) Ding concluded his article by stating:

Wang and Schleiermacher really made creative contributions to the philosophy of mind. The common purpose of these two great masters is to transform the lives of common people from the unexamined to the examined, the immoral to the moral, the religious to the secular, the corrupted to the purified, the particular to the universal, and the regional to the cosmopolitan through understanding and practicing the truth of life. A gradual process of self-transformation should be developed by highly justified and clarified theoretical guidelines. Any type of self-transformation follows the principle of self-transcendence, and is based on self-identification, and self-affirmation. The function of self-transformation is to release our spiritual life from an original bondage to a liberated freedom which is based on positive moral universalism. (Ibid, 103)

### 2.3.5. René Descartes and Principle

Mingjun Lu attempted to “recover the early philosophical modernity through a comparative analysis of the moral and epistemological implications of the metaphysics of the mind as propounded by Descartes and Yangming.” (Lu, 2019, 176) He quoted Descartes “‘I have taken the being or existence of this thought as the first principle’ (Principles 10). By thought or *cogito*, Descartes means ‘everything that is in us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it.’” (Ibid, 176) In comparison, Lu wrote: “According to Yangming, ‘The mind is principle,’ and ‘there is no principle outside the mind, and there are no things outside the mind.’”<sup>4</sup> While Descartes resorts to *cogito* to represent the first principle, Yangming uses the concept of *xin zhi benti* 心之本體, ‘the ontological being or onto-being of the mind,’ to address the mind’s ontological priority (CW, p. 23).” (Ibid, 176) He compared the Self in Descartes’ and Yangming’s Metaphysics of the Mind: “Yangming’s genuine self is also defined by the mind, but, unlike Descartes, Yangming insists on the close union of body and mind at both the ethical and epistemological levels.” (Ibid, 190) Lu concluded:

The early modern declaration that the mind is the first principle proves revolutionary in both the East and the West. A radical implication of the

metaphysics of the mind advocated by both Descartes and Yangming is that everyone has a mind, and since necessary truths are innate in the mind, everyone has the right and liberty to interpret the world by consulting his own mind. Individual subjectivity henceforth becomes a new yardstick of knowledge. This epistemological freedom and agency to interpret the world in one's own terms lies at the root of the rise of the autonomous self in both Renaissance Europe and Ming China. (Ibid, 191–92)

### 2.3.6. *Max Scheler and Value*

Mingjun Lu investigated “the phenomenology of values and moral emotions in Max Scheler and the Confucian learning of heart, especially Wang Yangming.” (Lu, 2014, 198) explained Wang's important concept of “pure knowing” (liang zhi 良知) as a noun, that is, innate knowledge, and as a verb, that is, the action of knowing. (Ibid, 197) He further explained: “Pure knowing is not scientific knowledge or comprehension of external ethical rules, but rather every person's clear awareness of morals, especially approval and disapproval ... For Wang, action is the actualization of knowing, and knowing is the beginning of action.” (Ibid, 199) Lu pointed out, “According to Scheler, value is abiding in every experience, and it is immediately given to us within our experiences through phenomenological intuition (Anschauung).” (Ibid, 201) He compared, “For Scheler, if one prefers differently from the order of preferring, it is called the disorder of heart, and the inversion of values is called resentment... for Wang Yangming, when one prefers pleasure to righteousness, pure knowing and original heart are covered by selfish desire. In Wang Yangming, everyone originally prefers heavenly principle to human desire, from which we can see the hierarchy of values in his thought.” (Ibid, 207) Lu concluded: “In summary, similar to Max Scheler, Confucian learning of heart affirms the intentional structure between the hierarchy of values on the one hand, and loving, preferring, and feeling of values on the other hand.” (Ibid, 210)

### 2.3.7. *Francis Bacon and Learning*

Xinzhong Yao compared the philosophical views on learning and learning methods elaborated by Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626). (Yao, 2013, 417) He intended to answer why modern science did not develop in China by looking into two different philosophical orientations on learning methods elaborated by the two men living almost in the same periods. (Ibid, 417) Yao stated:

Wang brought the learning of the heart-mind (xin 心) to its apex and furthered the belief that the goal of learning was an inward journey which aimed at nothing but being a sage, while Bacon established, or significantly contributed to, a “new” philosophy that aimed to enable humans to be the “master of nature” and that subsequently underlay the modern worldview. Neither Wang nor Bacon was the initiator of their own philosophy, nor were they the sole representative of their age in developing distinct methodological approaches. (Ibid, 417)

Yao continuously wrote: "While both Wang and Bacon similarly set up an objective for learning, their goal concepts differ. The goal for Wang is to become an idealistic sage, and the learning is therefore effectively defined as the 'sage learning,' while for Bacon, it is to help humanity achieve the mastery over nature." (Ibid, 422) He further compared:

Both Wang and Bacon believe that a sound mind is very important for the progress of learning. For Wang true learning cannot be achieved until selfish desires are wiped out, while for Bacon, to advance knowledge, we must first get rid of false notions or idols of the mind, that is, all the defects or errors that frustrate humans in their investigation of nature. However, unlike Wang who insists that the progress of learning comes from, and consists of, the realization of the good knowledge inherent in the heart-mind, Bacon emphasizes that the ultimate source of learning lies in natural laws embedded in the movement and operation of nature. Scientific studies of nature are to reveal its laws, or forms, or essence to us. (Ibid, 428)

Yao concluded that an appreciation of the mutual complementarity rather than opposition between these two philosophical approaches would signify the new and real advancement of learning. (Ibid, 417)

### III. Method

The author selects Wang Yangming and Lonergan's original works as his primary sources for this comparative study. He focuses on finding and analyzing the comparable core ideas and the examples they use to illustrate their ideas. The following are the selected primary sources:

- A. Wang, Yangming. *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-Ming*. Translated by Frederick Goodrich Henke, Kindle ed., The Open Court Publishing Co., 1916, 454 pages.

Annotation: In "Translator's Preface, Henke wrote: "In the work of translation, I had a Chinese scholar of the old school at my side, to give advice and assist in the interpretation of difficult passages. The volume herewith presented is a faithful translation of volume one of the four volume edition of Wang's works distributed by the Commercial Press, of Shanghai" (Wang, 1916, xiv).

- B. Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5th, Kindle ed., vol. 3, University of Toronto Press, 1957, 785 pages.

Annotation: According to Editors' Preface: "The present edition is based on that of 1958, but we have made numerous revisions of the text (over 130), have expanded the footnote material, added editorial notes and other appendices, and reworked the index."

- C. Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Method in Theology*. Edited by Frederick E Crowe and Robert M Doran, 2nd ed., vol. 14, University of Toronto Press, 1972, 438 pages.

Annotation: In the present volume, the editors have drawn mainly on the material presented in the summer institutes (1968-1971) in which Lonergan was reading from the text of the book in process. In the introduction, Lonergan wrote: "Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt. It is a framework for collaborative creativity. I would outline the various clusters of operations to be performed by theologians when they go about their various tasks. A contemporary method would conceive those tasks in the context of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy, of historicity, collective practicality, and coresponsibility." (Lonergan, 1972, 14:3)

#### IV. Findings

##### 4.1. The Mind as Embodiment of Heaven-Given Principles versus A Pure Desire of Mind for God

Frederick Goodrich Henke translated Wang Yangming's core idea Xinjili (心即理) as "the mind is the embodiment of heaven-given principles (natural law)" (Wang, 1916, 36). What are the "heaven-given principles"? Henke translated: "'Moral principles' here as elsewhere may also be translated 'heaven-given principles' or 'natural law'" (Ibid, 27). "When the mind is free from the obscuration of selfish aims, it is the embodiment of the principles of Heaven." (Ibid, 5).

What are specific examples to illustrate the idea of Xinjili (心即理)? In a conversation between Wang and his student, he was asked, "Why then do some devote themselves to virtue and others to vice?" Wang said, "The mind of the evil man has lost its original nature." (Ibid, 36). He used an example of treating parents and a tree metaphor to illustrate his idea of mind embodiment of heaven-given principles:

If the mind has no selfish aims, is perfectly under the control of heaven-given principles (natural law), and is sincerely devoted to filial piety, it will naturally think of and provide for the comfort of parents in winter and summer. These are all things that emanate from a mind which truly honors the parents; but it is necessary to have a mind that truly honors the parents before these things can emanate from it. Compare it to a tree. The truly filial mind constitutes the roots; the many details are the branches and leaves. The roots must first be there, and then later there may be branches and leaves. One does not first seek for the branches and leaves and afterwards cultivate the roots. (Ibid, 6)



The above-translated definitions and examples of the idea of Xinjili (心即理) show that the human mind is the root of thoughts and heaven-given principles are innate good thoughts. However, people need to fight against evil thoughts like selfishness to have the good thoughts brought into full play. Wang Yangming recognized that the mind of each human being is the starting place of thinking and learning.

Wang's idea of Xinjili (心即理) bears resemblance with Lonergan's idea of "...the pure desire of the mind is a desire of God, that the goodness of man's will consists in a consuming love of God, that the world of sense is, more than all else, a mystery that signifies God as we know him and symbolizes the further depths that lie beyond our comprehension...Bad will is not merely the inconsistency of rational self-consciousness; it also is sin against God." (Lonergan 1957, 3:692). Here is a comparison of their ideas in terms of the originality of the human mind:

Mind	Wang Yangming	Lonergan
Originality	Embodiment of heaven-given principles	A pure desire of mind for God
Virtue	Good thoughts	Goodness of man's will
Vice	Lost mind's original nature	Bad will is a sin against God

Both Wang and Lonergan invoked the words "Heaven" and "God" to demonstrate the utmost originality of the mind. Lonergan states: "This pure desire has an objective. It is a desire to know." (Ibid, 3:349) He defines: "...being is the objective of the pure desire to know. Being, then, is (1) all that is known, and (2) all that remains to be known." (Ibid, 3:350). He illustrates: "Every doubt that the pure desire is unrestricted serves only to prove that it is unrestricted. If you ask whether X might not lie beyond its range, the fact that you ask proves that X lies within its range." (Ibid, 3:352). Lonergan associated "God" with "being" by stating: "God is the ground of being; God's own being is self-explanatory and necessary." (Ibid, 3:371). Wang's heaven-given principles are like Lonergan's notion of God's being of all that is known and all that remains known. The author assumes that Wang Yongming's reference to "Heaven" and Lonergan's "God" have different connotations in their mind. However, the striking similarity is that both believe that the originality of heaven-given principles and a pure desire for God is the innate quality of the mind. People need to think with their own minds to know the thoughts of virtue and fight against the thoughts of vice.

#### 4.2. Unity of Knowledge and Practice versus Consistency of Knowing and Doing

Henke translated Wang Yangming's core idea Zhixingheyi (知行合一), as the unity of knowledge and practice. (Wang, 1916, 133) Henke translated Wang's responses to his disciple's inquiry, "In what way do knowledge and practice become a unity?" Wang (Ibid, 133) said: "Extensive learning implies that in all things one should learn how to cherish natural law, while earnest practice carries with it the idea of learning without ceasing." Wang (Ibid, 263) further states: "If knowledge without practice

cannot be considered exhaustive investigation, then you may know that in the unity and mutual development of knowledge and practice no distinction can be made.” In discussing the issue of learning without practice, Wang said: “At present you estimate this merely from the assertions of others and from the meaning of the characters, and for that reason you are influenced to emphasize that which is inexact. The more you speak, the more confused you become. This is a defect in which you are unable to appreciate the unity of knowledge and practice.” (Ibid, 237) Wang used two examples to show that practice is the test of the properness of intuitive knowledge:

As for Shun's marrying without telling his parents, was there anyone previous to that time who served as an example of such a practice? In what historical and mythological documents did he find a precedent? Of what individual did he make inquiry before he acted? Or did he rather make use of his intuitive knowledge to estimate what should be done, and there being no other way, act as he did? As for Wu's putting troops into the field before burying his father, was there anyone previous to his time who had put troops into the field before burying his father? ... If Shun's mind was not sincere in the matter of having no posterity, and Wu's in the matter of saving the people, and the former married without telling his parents and the latter put an army into the field before burying his father, then their lack of filial piety and loyalty was great. (Ibid, 273)

Lonergan used the phrase “knowing and doing” in many pages of the book *Insight*. It is almost identical to Henke's “knowledge and practice” translation. The keyword in Wang's idea is “unity,” which means that person can know what he learned through doing it. Although Lonergan did not use the word “unity” with knowing and doing, he used the word “consistency” along with “knowing and doing.” Lonergan believed that ethics was concerned with the consistency of knowing and doing within the individual's rational self-consciousness. (Lonergan, 1957, 3:666) He states:

Man is not only a knower but also a doer; the same intelligent and rational consciousness grounds the doing as well as the knowing; and from that identity of consciousness there springs inevitably an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing... Not a little ingenuity is needed to transpose inconsistency between knowing and doing into inconsistency within knowing itself. The average mind can invent lies about matters of fact; it can trump up excuses; it can allege extenuating circumstances that mingle fact with fiction. But hypocrisy is no more than the tribute paid by vice to virtue. (Ibid, 3:599)

Wang's unity of knowledge and practice and Lonergan's consistency of knowing and doing express similar ideas. Wang attempted to use practice to verify the correctness of the knowledge, whereas Lonergan discouraged a person from knowing good ethics but doing bad things.

#### 4.3. Extending Intuitive Knowledge of the Good to the Utmost Versus Self-Appropriation

Henke translated Wang Yangming's core idea Zhiliangzhi (致良知), as "to extend intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost" (Wang, 1916, 144).<sup>2</sup> He explained the meaning of "utmost" by stating: "Therefore he who wishes to make his purpose sincere must extend his knowledge of the good to the utmost by developing his intuitive faculty to the utmost. The utmost here is like the utmost of the saying, 'When mourning has been carried to the utmost degree of grief, it should cease'" (Ibid, 166). His disciple Chiu-ch'uan said, "Extend it in what way?" Wang said, "The little intuitive knowledge of good you have is your own standard. If your thoughts are right it is aware of it, and if they are wrong it also knows. You must not blind it nor impose upon it, but must truly follow its lead. Whatever is good should be cherished; whatever is evil should be discarded. What confidence and joy there is in this! This is the true secret of the investigation of things, and the real method of extending knowledge to the utmost." (Ibid, 104) Wang used his parents-caring example again:

When the intuitive knowledge which knows how to care for the comfort of parents in winter and summer has been extended to the utmost, the purpose of thus providing for parents will be sincere. The same holds true with regard to nourishing parents. These are my sayings regarding making the purpose sincere, completing knowledge, and investigating things. If you become familiar in thought with this point, you will no longer be in doubt. (Ibid, 270)

Wang summarized his idea of extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost in four Chinese sentences, and here is Henke's translation: "Being without virtue and without evil is the original nature of the mind, while the presence of virtue and vice is due to the activity of the purpose (will). Knowledge of good and evil is due to the intuitive faculty. To do good and abhor evil implies the investigation of things" (Ibid, 149).<sup>3</sup> It is the author's understanding that Wang's statement means that a human being is born with neither virtue nor evil. It is a significant departure from the two great Confucian thinkers: Mengzi's (Mencius c. 372-289 BCE.) position of "the inborn potential of human beings to be the presumption of virtues"; whereas Xunzi's (Hsün Tzu, c. 310-c. 220 BCE) position on "human beings might originally be evil." (Richey, n.d.).

The author believes that Wang's idea of extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost has similarities with Lonergan's idea of self-appropriation. Lonergan states: "The self-appropriation of one's own intellectual and rational self-

<sup>2</sup> "chih liang chih" is the original spelling of the three Chinese words according to the system of Sir Thomas Wade by Henke.

<sup>3</sup> Wang's four sentences instruction in Chinese "無善無惡心之體 (Wú shàn wú èxīn zhī tǐ), 有善有惡意之動 (yǒu shàn yǒu èyì zhī dòng), 知善知惡是良知 (zhī shànzhī è shì liángzhī), 為善去惡是格物 (wéi shàn qù è shì géwù)."

consciousness begins as cognitional theory, expands into a metaphysics and an ethics, mounts to a conception and an affirmation of God, only to be confronted with a problem of evil that demands the transformation of self-reliant intelligence into an *intellectus quaerens fidem*.” (Lonergan, 1957, 3:731) Both Wang and Lonergan mentioned a problem of “evil.” Wang’s “intuitive faculty” is similar to Lonergan’s “The self-appropriation of one’s own intellectual and rational self-consciousness.” Wang’s “To do good and abhor evil implies the investigation of things” is similar to Lonergan’s “the transformation of self-reliant intelligence.”

The author thinks that Lonergan’s following statement on self-appropriation provides a method to achieve Wang’s goal of extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost:

Because dialectical theology is based on the theologian’s self-appropriation. It cannot be philosophically or morally neutral. Self-appropriation is not only familiarity with one’s own conscious and intentional operations but also familiarity with all the oversights and overemphases that result in mistaken cognitional theories, inadequate epistemologies, faulty or non-existent ontologies. Self-appropriation cannot stop short with cognitional self-transcendence; it has to go to the real self-transcendence that pursues values and thereby moves towards the elimination of the biases that spring from unconscious motivation, individual or group egoism, and the rashly assumed omniscience of common sense. (Lonergan, 1972, 14:380–81)

In short, self-appropriation is the process of thinking with one’s mind to know the heaven-given principles by distinguishing the thoughts of virtue and vice, unifying the knowledge and practice, keeping the consistency of knowing and doing, and extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost.

## V. Conclusion

Henke wrote in the introduction of *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-Ming*: “Instead of an essay or a logically planned system, we have for the most part detached sayings or comments of the sage drawn out by his disciples’ questions and written down by them or else embodied in letters.” (Wang, 1916, viii) Henke’s English translation helped the author understand the original Chinese text. By comparing the core philosophical ideas between Wang Yangming and Bernard Lonergan, the author has better understood both ideas. It is the author’s fantastic journey of “east meets west.” The two great thinkers were 450+ years apart and 6,000 miles apart, yet they used two different languages to express their ideas in such commonalities. Based on the analyses of the evidence found in their respective works, the author can draw the following conclusions:

1. Wang's "mind" as the embodiment of heaven-given principles (Xinjili 心即理) is comparable to Lonergan's "pure desire of mind" for God with the goodness of man's will.
2. Wang's unity of knowledge and practice (Zhixingheyi 知行合一) is comparable to Lonergan's consistency of knowing and doing.
3. Wang's extending intuitive knowledge of the good to the utmost (Zhiliangzhi 致良知) is comparable to Lonergan's self-appropriation.

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